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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to investigate the effects of one hypnotic session on the reading improvement of high-risk college students with low aptitude scores and histories of failure in academic situations. The 27 students in the experimental group participated in a one-hour hypnosis session in which they were given a procedure to follow for self-hypnosis before reading activities. Another 33 students served as a control group. The records that the students in the experimental group kept helped divide that group into three categories for further analysis: those students who hypnotized themselves fewer than five times, those who hypnotized themselves from five to nine times, and those who hypnotized themselves more than nine times. The experimental group as a whole showed greater gains on vocabulary and comprehension test scores than the control group. The data also indicated that students who hypnotized themselves more than nine times during the ten weeks of the study made significantly greater improvements in both reading vocabulary and comprehension than those who hypnotized themselves fewer times or students in the control group. The results clearly indicated that the regular use of self-hypnosis significantly improved reading performance. (RL)

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IMPROVING READING PERFORMANCE THROUGH HYPNOSIS

Research literature on hypnosis provides support for the use of hypnosis as a technique for improving reading performance. Several hypnotic techniques have been utilized in an assortment of educational situations. Krippner (1966) applied hypnosis in a summer reading clinic to help students with such varied reading problems as lack of motivation, lack of concentration, and release of excess tension. Donk, et al. (1968) used post-hypnotic suggestion to help students in a college mental health class improve their reading rate. Scharf and Zamansky (1961) used hypnosis to reduce word recognition time as measured by tachistoscopic means.

The findings reported in hypnotic research as an aid to reading improvement range from no differences to quite significant differences. Uhr (1958) reviewed the research regarding hypnosis and learning and stated that little conclusive evidence could be drawn from the research but that the possibility for improvement of learning under a well managed hypnotic trance could be striking.

The need for design and research on the application of group hypnotic techniques in educational settings, and reading in particular, is made evident by the lack of research in this area. Most of the studies, however, describe one-to-one situations in which the pupils were hypnotized on a regular basis. As school teachers well know, this type of situation is impractical because of the pressure of time and the high cost factor.

Yet, the potential of group hypnosis as a technique for improving learning seems to be promising. It was the purpose of this study to investigate the effects of hypnosis on the learning improvement of students who were hypnotized only once in a group situation. If there were significant improvements in reading performance as the result of one hypnotic session in a group situation, this technique would seem to be practical in terms of both the time and cost factors.

Procedure

Students enrolled in the Reading and Writing Center of a large state university were selected as subjects. Students in the Center came largely from two groups: those admitted under Special Admission status, and those regularly admitted who were referred by university instructors or counselors. Students in the Center are initially administered the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. This test is one of the most widely used instruments in college reading programs and correlates highly (.67) with other predictors of success in college. The test measures vocabulary, comprehension, and reading rate. Students attend a one-hour class twice a week, have their reading skills diagnosed (with the Nelson-Denny and other informal measures), and work on remedial and developmental activities.

The names of all students enrolled in the winter quarter were typed alphabetically on a list. They were then assigned randomly to an experimental or control group using a table of random numbers. The investigator visited each class and explained the purpose and procedures of the investigation in

detail. Students in the experimental group were asked to sign "Informed Consent" forms which described the investigation and stated that participants would not receive renumeration for their participation and could, therefore, drop out at any time. Two students chose not to participate.

There were 27 students in the experimental group and 33 students in the control group. There were no significant differences between these groups on the Nelson-Denny Reading Test given at the beginning of the quarter. Results of this pretest are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Mean Scores on Nelson-Denny Pretest

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	s.d.
Control	33	21.58	18.56
Experimental	27	24.85	18.03

After the group assignments were made, the investigator attended each reading class, took experimental subjects into another classroom, and hypnotized them as a group.

The hypnosis session was similar for each group. The investigator briefly explained that hypnosis is a state of high suggestability arrived at cooperatively by a hypnotist and subject. Only suggestions that are acceptable to the subject will normally be implemented. The investigator described the suggestions he would make and then answered questions.

Students were then asked to become comfortable in their seats, select a spot on which to fix their eyes, and to take several deep breaths. The investigator invited subjects to turn

their attention to the top of their heads and to allow their head muscles to relax. They were to imagine relaxation flowing throughout their bodies as the investigator mentioned the various muscle groups that should be relaxed, beginning with the head, then the face, throat, neck, shoulders, arms, and ending with the toes.

Once subjects demonstrated visable signs of being in a trance, they were invited to allow their minds to relax as the investigator counted from ten backwards to zero. They were told that, at the count of zero, they would be as relaxed, both physically and mentaily, as they could be at this time, would maintain contact with the investigator's voice, would stop this side of sleep, and would automatically follow all suggestions of the investigator that were acceptable to them.

The investigator then asked subjects to imagine themselves reading fluently and thoroughly enjoying the experience. He explained to them that since the mind is like a computer, all the words they see in reading are already in their minds. He suggested that when the subjects come out of the trance, they would read faster and with more comprehension because the words they knew would immediately become available to them when they saw them written.

Subjects were given a procedure to follow and told that whenever they followed this procedure with the intention of hypnotizing themselves, they would go immediately into a trance. The procedure is as follows:

Whenever subjects wished to hypnotize themselves, they were

to seat themselves comfortably, fix their eyes on a spot across the room where the wall and ceiling meet, and take five deep breaths. They were to hold the fifth deep breath and count backwards from five to one. On the count of one, they would exhale, close their eyes, and go into a deep relaxed state. At this point, they were to inventory muscle groups to ensure that all are relaxed. Then they were to count backwards from ten and allow themselves to relax mentally. Now they reinforce all the suggestions made by the investigator. This procedure should involve five to ten minutes. At the end of this time, they tell themselves that they will count to five and at the count of five, they will come out of the trance refreshed, relaxed, and confident that the suggestions they made will be implemented.

Students were asked to hypnotize themselves in the above fashion before each reading class and to reinforce the suggestions already given to them. It was emphasized that each time they did this, their reading fluency would improve. Subjects were then brought out of the trance and told that they would feel fine and that the suggestions given to them would automatically be implemented. They were asked to keep a record of the number of times they hypnotized themselves.

This ended the experimental treatment. Subjects were asked to hypnotize themselves prior to their reading classes, but no effort was made to encourage them to do so. The time spent by the hypnotist was approximately one hour per class or a total of five hours.

At the end of the quarter the students were given an alternate

form of the Nelson-Denny Reading Test and a tally was made of the number of assignments completed. Additionally, students in the experimental group were asked for their records of the frequency of their self hypnosis. The group divided naturally into three categories: those who hypnotized themselves fewer than five times; those who hypnotized themselves from five to nine times, and those who hypnotized themselves more than nine times.

Results

When the experimental and control groups were compared by gain scores in vocabulary, the control group had a mean gain score of 7.73 and the experimental group had a gain of 9.70. The pattern for the comprehension section was similar. The control group had a mean gain score of 15.22 and the experimental group had a gain of 19.24.

The most startling results occurred within the experimental group. When a comparison is made between the vocabulary growth of students who hypnotized themselves 0-4 times and those who hypnotized themselves 5-9 times, a definite improvement is evident. The 0-4 group had a mean gain of 9.16 and the 5-9 group had a mean gain of 11.78. The results are even more impressive when these groups are compared to the 10+ times group. These data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Gain Scores in Vocabulary

Group	N	mean	s.d.
Experimental 0-4 times	5	9.16	20.27
Experimental 5-9 times	9	11.78	8.30
Experimental 10+ times	4	20.50	10.72

Similar results occurred in the comprehension section -- the more frequently students practiced self hypnosis, the greater the improvement. This improvement apparently occurred without an increase in the number of assignments. The mean assignments completed by all groups -- control, experimental and the three breakdowns of the experimental group -- only varied by one. It appears evident that the quality of performance on the task is more important than the quantity of tasks.

Table 3
Gain Scores in Comprehension

Group	N	mean	s.d.
Experimental 0-4 times	5	- 6.3	39.39
Experimental 5-9 times	9	6.6	17.54
Experimental 10+ times	4	17.0	16.83

Clearly, the small sample size does not make these data generalizable; however, it is highly suggestible that self hypnosis may be a useful technique for improving the reading performance of some students.

Conclusions and Implications

In conclusion, it was the purpose of this study to investigate the effects of one hypnotic session on the reading improvement of University students enrolled in a reading and writing center. These students who were generally minority students had not met the University's admission requirements or were students who had been referred to the Center because of

poor reading skills. In both cases, they were considered to be high risk students because of their low aptitude scores and histories of failure in academic situations. If the reading performance of this group was improved through one hypnotic session, support for the use of self hypnosis in the classroom is strengthened.

The data indicated that students who hypnotized themselves more than nine times during a ten week quarter made significantly greater improvements in both reading vocabulary and comprehension than those who hypnotized themselves fewer times or students in the control group who were not hypnotized at all.

The results of this study clearly indicate that for these students the regular use of self hypnosis significantly improved their reading performance. The maximum of five hours required of the hypnotist provided significant returns. More research, however, needs to be conducted investigating the use of group instruction in self hypnosis to improve academic performance in the classroom situation.

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